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## A RELIGION FOR THE NON-MYSTICAL MIND:

JAMES 1:22-27

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I sometimes ask myself, when I come away from certain religious gatherings: Has Christianity any religion for the unemotional type of mind? Must a man become a mystic to be a Christian? There are many men who cannot become mystics. The emotional sense of the presence of the Divine, the sweep of feeling that carries one out of himself, the mystic ecstasy, is not for them. Sometimes they have never known the experience. It is absolutely apart from their life. Sometimes they have known it all too well. They recall times when they were swept from their feet by the mystic side of Christianity, when they tasted the sweetness of an emotional religious experience. They are not inclined to ridicule it. It played a part in their developing religious life. It has passed now; and they are glad it has passed, and have no desire that it should return.

Now, our communities are full of men—and to a somewhat less extent, of women—who are described, with more or less accuracy, in these terms. Their purposes are right. They lead noble lives. They honor the law of God. They find their greatest inspiration in the teachings and life of Christ. But they are often told, with varying degrees of plainness, that they may be moral, but they are not religious. All their fear of God, their love of holiness, their reverence and imitation of Christ, are of no avail. When they analyze the situation, they begin to see that there is, especially in the non-liturgical churches, a tendency to throw out as illegitimate all types of religious life except the mystical. It is sometimes said that the church is not gaining, as we have a right to believe it should, among the hard-headed, hard-working men of the world. If that is so, may not one reason be that the church exalts the mystic type of religion, and ignores the unemotional type? Is it not significant that, when you ask a man what he thinks religion is, his answer will usually be in ethical-rational terms; when you ask him what kind of religion he

thinks the church would expect him to have if he offered to join it, his answer will usually be in mystical terms?

It is worth while to examine the Bible and find if Christianity has a religion for the non-mystical type of mind. Certainly Judaism had. The whole wisdom literature is the expression of exactly this type of religious thought. One might expect that Christianity would not be less universal in its appeal. A study of the New Testament shows, what one would expect to be the case, that there is abundance of room for the Christian of the unemotional, ethical-rational type. Christ is his master too, as well as that of the mystic. The Sermon on the Mount speaks directly to his type of mind. Not one word of it lies outside his experience. The great mass of the teachings of Jesus appeals to him. He knows what Jesus meant by loving God and loving your brother. He finds no requirement for mystic ecstasy laid down by his Master. He finds that mysticism was abundant in the early church. It is to be recognized in the speaking with tongues and in some other spiritual gifts. Paul had more than a touch of it. Very evidently it was a part of developing Christianity, as it has been of almost every other religion in the world; but evidently it is not all, nor even an essential part, of Christianity.

The Epistle of James is the clearest New Testament expression of the ethical-rational type of religion. It reads like a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. Certain passages of it are specially valuable as coming close to a definition of religion as it appeals to the practical and unemotional mind. Perhaps the most comprehensive of these is 1:22-27. The passage is a protest against religion which evaporates in talk, and a definition of the true issue of religion in terms of efficiency. It states principles and gives illustrations. The principles are two:

1. God has spoken a word to man (see vss. 19-21). The writer does not define the word, nor does he say how it has been spoken. It is not difficult to see what he means. He is speaking to Christians. The "word" is the whole gospel. It is (vs. 21) able to save, but how it saves he returns to say later (in 2:14-26). At present he merely lays the foundation that there is a word of God which has come to his readers.

2. This word must bear fruit in the actions of life. That is the one way by which God may be served. That seems commonplace,

but a large number of most earnest Christians do not believe it. They think that God may also be served by a mystic feeling. Now, emotional experiences of many kinds may incite to the service of God, and so may be of great religious value; but the experience itself is not the service of God. It is not worship, in the true sense of the word.

Two illustrations of a wrong issue of religion are given:

1. The man who is only a hearer of the word.
2. The man who fails to control his speech.

Two illustrations of the right issue of religion are set over against these:

1. The man who not only hears, but acts on what he hears.
2. The man whose life is merciful and pure.

In each case the first is a general, the second a specific statement. The general case is made more plain by the figure of the mirror. The property of the mirror is to show the truth. A man who only glances into it and then goes away—what does he really know about what he is? He forgets what his glance has shown. But the man who bends over and looks intently into it—the word used implies this—finds out what the other never thought of. He reads there God's perfect law of liberty. Here the figure fails to express all the writer's meaning, and is dropped as inadequate. This figure of the mirror loses half its force in our land, where mirrors hang on every wall. In the ancient East, as in many parts of the present East, a mirror was an article of luxury. I recall the frank curiosity and eagerness with which I have seen children and even grown men in the East study themselves in a small mirror. The operation did not seem undignified nor the result unprofitable. "He who really gives attention to the word from God," says our author, "finds that it is a law of God, and he becomes not merely a listener, but 'a doer of work'." That is the way religion appeals to the man of the unemotional, ethical-rational type of thought. The recognition of the word of God seems to him to issue, not necessarily in mystic feeling—that may or may not be, according to temperament—but in getting something done. That is essential, the other is incidental.

At this point the mystic is sure to rise and say: "But love—are you not leaving that out?" "By no means," he answers. "But what is love? Tell me that." Romantic novelists have combined with religious mystics to make us almost forget that love is a great

underlying purpose in life, of which ecstatic emotion is not the highest expression. Self-devotion is infinitely higher. In fact, emotion and action are in inverse ratio to each other. The common events of life teach us that vigorous action relieves emotion. A man tries to draw his friend away from the weight of his sorrow by interesting him in activity. The law holds for religion also. Love is devotion, not emotion. It is to be defined in terms of will. It wills to devote itself to the best interests of its object. Let us refuse to allow the mystic to appropriate for his exclusive use the word "love." We may go farther. We may say to him: "Your type of love is genuine, but it is only love in blossom. It is immature, adolescent. The other type of love is very much higher than yours. That is love in fruitage, ripened, matured. You may well pray to grow out of your present type of religious life into that."

Most of the rest of the Epistle of James is an explication of this type of religion issuing in various phases of life. Vss. 26, 27 are statements—introductory and comprehensive, but specific—of this issue. They have to do with worship—that is what the word translated "religion" means—worship in the broadest sense; the objective side of religion, what it issues in. The word is used here only in the New Testament, though a kindred word occurs in Acts 26:5; Col. 2:18, 23. A man who thinks he is expressing his religion, says the author, and who cannot even control his tongue, let alone doing anything for anyone else, is expressing no religion. That expression consists in helping others and living a pure life. The true worship of God is not mysticism, but ethics. Religion is not "conduct touched with emotion." It is conduct, regardless of emotion, pursued under the sense of duty to God. Conduct usually issues in emotion of greater or less intensity; but the conduct is primary, the emotion secondary. It would not be far wrong to call emotion the by-product of conduct. The chief emphasis is not to be placed upon by-products.

The unemotional man may come from his study of the Bible feeling that he is not an outcast from the household of faith. Christianity has a place for his type of thought. I am convinced that pastors and teachers can help large numbers of the most thoughtful and most hard-working people under their charge by the plain statement of this fact.